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# Dilemma in 'Credibility Gap'

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WASHINGTON.

For the past two days, the Johnson administration has been grappling with what might best be described as a credibility problem of its own making. From the White House on down the highest officials of the government have been busily denying that the United States role in the Dominican Republic is anything other than one of strict neutrality.

These denials have come from Presidential Press Secretary George Beedy, from Secretary of State Dean Rusk from United Nations Ambassador Adlai Stevenson and from Ellsworth Bunker, U. S. Ambassador to the Organization of American States.

The Administration is discovering, however, as other Administrations have in the past, that when the gap between a government's actions and its words becomes discernible, it is in trouble.

News reports from Santo Domingo, appearing in this newspaper and others, have told of U. S. Marines assisting the junta forces of Gen. Antonio Imbert Barreras against the rebels of Col. Francisco Caamaño Deno. News photos and television film clips have reinforced this impression.

One film seen by perhaps millions of Americans on CBS-TV showed an interview with a U. S. Marine. As machine guns chattered in the background, the Marine described the rebels as the "enemy."

Were the Marines, then, as-

sisting the junta? the reporter asked. "That's right," the Marine replied.

The problem is much larger than the opinion of one fighting man on the scene; however. It goes to the roots of modern government trying to settle a complex political and military crisis with everybody watching.

The credibility problem began the very night that President Johnson made the decision to send in the Marines, the night of April 28.

The Chief Executive, determined to prevent another Cuba, called in Congressional leaders of both parties and informed them of his grave decision. Adm. William F. Raborn, sworn in less than seven months earlier as the new director of the Central Intelligence Agency, warned the Congressmen of the danger of a Communist-Castro-style takeover in Santo Domingo.

The New York Herald Tribune was the first newspaper in the nation to report what had taken place at this meeting—and to report that the President was acting not only to save American lives, but in the hope of preventing a Communist uprising.

On the night of April 28, however, Mr. Johnson, in a two-minute televised statement to the nation, said simply that he had dispatched the Marines "in order to protect American lives." He made no mention of the alleged Communist threat looming in the background. The omission surprised some of the Congressmen.

The next day, the White

House insisted that the Marines had landed for the reason given, to protect American lives. Not until Sunday May 2, four nights later, did the President make any direct mention of Communists.

That night he said on TV: "And what began as a popular democratic revolution, committed to democracy and social justice, very shortly moved and was taken over and really seized and placed into the hands of a band of Communist conspirators."

Could it be that the Communists had appeared in the revolt only after April 28 and before May 2? Not so. On May 4, the President spoke to a group of key Congressmen in the East Room of the White House. The official transcript includes this statement:

"In our first meeting that night (referring to April 28) from 3 o'clock when we got our cable, until 7 o'clock when we met with the Congressional leaders, our intelligence indicated that two of the prime leaders in the rebel forces were men with a long history of Communist association and insurrections. One had fought in the Spanish Civil War and both had been given detailed lengthy training in operations of this type.

"As reports came in, as they do every few minutes, it developed there were eight of those who were in the movement that had been trained by Communist forces."

In short, the Administration had first denied, then admitted, that one motive for landing Marines was the fear

of a Communist takeover of the revolt. Soon, a new credibility problem arose.

The U. S. encouraged Gen. Imbert to set up his new military junta as a counterforce to the rebels. Negotiations with Gen. Imbert to this end reportedly took place on the U. S. aircraft carrier Boxer.

With the rebels pinned down in the southern Ciudad Nueva quarter, the Imbert forces last Saturday were free to move against one group of rebels north of the U. S.-held corridor cutting across Santo Domingo.

But the news reports and films of U. S. Marines assisting the junta endangered the U. S. posture in Latin America and the world. They raised at least the specter of an American Hungary, with American forces mowing down underdog rebels as the Russians did in Budapest in 1956.

So the insistence in the past two days that the U. S. policy is one of "neutrality." But if, as the President said on May 2, "Communist conspirators" have seized the revolt, why is the U. S. neutral?

Facing that dilemma, the policymakers have said little in recent days about Communists in the rebel movement.

Like a series of Chinese boxes, each Administration explanation has in turn led to another. The result has been that officials already busy trying to settle the crisis in the Dominican republic have had to take time out to deal with the credibility crisis at home.